

**PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION
FOR PEOPLE IN CHINA
ADMITTED TO A U.S. COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY**

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

This site is intended for people in China who have been admitted to a college or university in the United States.

People who have been admitted to a U.S. school can use this site *before leaving China* to help assure they do everything possible to benefit from their travel and study experience. They can also refer to the site *after arriving in the United States* to help them achieve their objectives and avoid problems.

People who are still seeking information about studying in the United States can find some helpful links in Chapter Eight, "Other Sources of Information."

This site is not able to provide specialized advice on obtaining F or J visas for study or research in the United States. Visa-related security measures the U. S. government introduced following the September 11 terrorist attacks produced delays and confusion for many visa applicants. By fall, 2004, additional Department of State staffing and improved procedures had shortened delays and reduced confusion somewhat, but problems remained. In September 2005, the Department of State issued instructions reinterpreting the "immigrant intent" provision of the immigration law, a step that promises to greatly reduce what had long been a major obstacle for Chinese applicants for student visas.

The only advice this site can offer is to *apply for your visa as early as possible* and to carefully follow the instructions and advice on the web site of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, at <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/>.

The *sponsor and developers of this site* hope the site will help students from China gain maximum benefit from their studies in the United States and will return to China with additional education, improved English-language proficiency, and a larger capacity to work constructively in international and intercultural environments.

- Financial support for this site comes from the SMBC Global Foundation, which provides scholarships and academic support for students from Asian countries, including China.
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators oversaw development of this site. NAFSA is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit professional association, focused on promoting international education and exchange.
- Gang Wang, associate director of the Office of International Students and Scholars at Yale University (U.S.A.) designed the site. Gary Althen, retired director of the Office of International Students and Scholars at the University of Iowa (U.S.A.) wrote the material.
- Larry Daks, a retired U.S. foreign-service officer with years of experience in China and other Asian countries, served as consultant to the developers.
- Members of the advisory committee helped guide the development of this project. They include Gang Wang (mentioned above), Michael Brzezinski of Purdue University; Mary Funari, Washington State University; Jay Horn, University of

Texas at Austin; Karen Huang, Lehigh University; and Hu Qing Iavicoli, formerly of Harvard University.

You will find two kinds of boxes in this text:

Boxes with broken-line frames contain detailed, substantive information.

Boxes with solid-line frames contain quotations, people's stories, or other supplementary material intended to give examples of or amplify on points in the text.

CHAPTER 1

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Being admitted to a U.S. college or university and getting an U.S. visa are the first steps in a major development in your life. Your preparation for this experience began when you applied for admission to the school and for the visa.

The next steps take place while you are still in China. “First Things First” is about things you can do *before leaving China* in order to better prepare yourself for your new life. It is also about things you should do as soon as possible after arriving in the United States.

“First Things First” contains much information and many suggestions. You may not be able to follow all the suggestions because you will be busy. But, the more you can follow, the better.

“First Things First” discusses these topics:

- 1.1 Read Your School’s Information
 - 1.2 Practice Your English
 - 1.3 Make Travel Arrangements
 - 1.4 Make Financial Arrangements
 - 1.5 Contact Your School’s Chinese Student Association
 - 1.6 Obtain Medical, Dental, and Vision Examinations
 - 1.7 Pack Properly
 - 1.8 Arrange for Housing
 - 1.8.1 Arranging Temporary Housing
 - 1.8.2 Selecting Permanent Housing
 - 1.8.2.1 Potential Roommates
 - 1.8.2.2 Smoking
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 - 1.8.3 Leases
 - 1.8.4 Renter’s Insurance
 - 1.9 Purchase Health and Accident Insurance
 - 1.10 A Pre-departure Checklist
 - 1.11 Reflect
 - 1.12 On Arrival
 - 1.12.1 Visit the International Student Office
 - 1.12.2 Find Housing
 - 1.12.3 Open a Bank Account
 - 1.12.4 Apply for a Social Security Number (if necessary)
 - 1.12.5 Attend Orientation Program(s)
 - 1.12.6 Visit Your Academic Department
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1.1. Read Your School's Information

Your school has probably sent you some printed information. *Be sure to read that information carefully.* If you have questions, direct them to the office that sent you the information, unless that information itself tells you to send your questions somewhere else. It is most efficient to e-mail your questions.

Use your school's World Wide Web site to learn more about the institution. (Some schools' web sites are comprehensive, up-to-date, and easy to navigate. Others are less so. Whatever the quality of your school's site, you ought to review it.)

Probably you have already reviewed the parts of the site concerning admissions and your own field of study. You should also look at the site for the International Student Office, or ISO.

International Student Office (ISO)

Most U.S. schools have an office or at least a staff member responsible for international-student matters. These offices have different names on different campuses. Possibilities include International Student and Scholar Services, International Education Services, International Education, and some others. You can search your school's web site for the office's name if it is not in the information the school sent you.

ISOs are normally responsible for orientation programs for new foreign students, helping students comply with U.S. immigration laws and regulations, fulfilling federal "reporting requirements" concerning foreign students, encouraging educational interactions between foreign and domestic students, and many other matters.

Other offices whose sites you might want to review include housing, student health, student activities, and recreation.

Housing Office

Most U.S. colleges and universities have an office concerned with *housing* or *residential services*. Housing-office functions differ from one school to another. Sometimes their only role is to administer student housing that the school owns. Other times they compile information about off-campus (that is, non-institutional) housing. The housing office's web site will explain what it does.

Finally, you may be able to read the school's *student newspaper* on line, and learn about the campus from that less formal source. A list of the names of many U.S. student newspapers is at www.colleges-online.com/studentnews.

1.2. Practice Your English

Current and former Chinese students in the United States strongly agree that *the most important factor in a successful U.S. experience is English proficiency*, both spoken and written. (See box below.) As soon as you know you are going to the United States, you should seize every opportunity to practice speaking English. In particular, practice understanding spoken English and speaking it with other people.

Advice from Many Chinese Students

“Polish your English before you come to the States. I’ve seen too many students...with language barriers.” This is the suggestion of one Chinese student in the United States. Dozens of such students were asked their advice for new students from China. The topic they mentioned most often was *English*. Here is a small sample of their many suggestions on this point:

- Learn English well, especially speaking and writing.
- A good preparation [in] English is as important as that in your academic field. Good English makes you confident and ready to be integrated to life in the U.S.
- Social ability using English is very, very important.
- Speak English whenever you can, even if you speak broken English. Be brave and practice a lot! Watch TV to enhance listening and try to mimic speaking to learn the right accent.
- Practice your English a lot and improve your communication skills, which [are] very important, especially when you look for a job.
- Develop good oral and written communication ability in English, the sooner the better.

It is best to practice with native speakers of American English, so you can hear their pronunciation and intonation and adjust your pronunciation so they can understand you. If you cannot find an American, look for tapes, CDs, DVDs, radio or television programs, or movies in which Americans speak. Do everything you can to practice American English *every day*. This may be inconvenient while you are busy preparing for your trip, but it will prove invaluable later.

1.3. Make Travel Arrangements

If you are going to fly to your school, make sure you get a ticket for the *airport nearest your school*. Otherwise, you may have to spend precious money and time getting to your school overland.

Be sure you know how you will travel from the airport to your school or to the place you will be living. The information your school sent you should include detailed instructions about this.

In many cases, new students from China get a ride from the airport with a Chinese Student Association (see Sec. 1.5, below) member. However, you should not assume that someone will pick you up at the airport unless you have made a specific arrangement.

Not all new students fly all the way to their new school. Some fly to a coastal city or some other place away from the school. New students do this in order to visit friends or relatives or to see tourist sites. Then they continue to school via air, rail, or bus.

Rail travel in the United States is provided by Amtrak, whose web site is at www.amtrak.com. A major bus company is called Greyhound, whose web site is at www.greyhound.com.

1.4. Make Financial Arrangements

Your school has sent you information about the costs of living and studying there. Read that information carefully. In addition, keep the following in mind:

- ◆ In your application for admission and for a visa, you provided documents assuring that you had enough money for all your expenses. From the American viewpoint, this documentation means you actually have the money, or at least have unrestricted access to it. *If you do not actually have the money or access to it, you should not go to the United States.* Living is expensive there, especially if you have a spouse and/or children who cannot work and need health insurance, and financial aid for foreign students is in very short supply. The box on the following page depicts an all-too-common situation.
- ◆ Do not assume you can obtain more financial aid from the school after you arrive in the United States. You might be able to, once you have proven your academic merit, but you should not assume you will.
- ◆ If you will have a graduate assistantship from the start of your studies, remember that (a) some of your salary will be withheld for income taxes; (b) before you can be paid you will need to go through some procedures to obtain a U.S. social security number and to “get on the payroll” at your institution; (c) you may not receive any pay until sometime in the month after school opens; and (d) your assistantship may last for only one year even though your program continues for several years.

Embarrassment, Frustration, and Futility

“I need financial aid,” the new student said to the foreign student adviser in the ISO.

“Well,” the adviser said, “what about the money you documented to the admissions office and the consular officer?”

“My uncle signed the papers to say he would support me,” the student replied. “But he cannot do that easily. I do not want to take his money. I want to earn my own way. I just needed that document to get my admission and my visa.”

“I am sorry I cannot help you,” the adviser said. “You submitted those documents and we believed them. We admitted you because of them. If you do not actually have the money, there is nothing we can do for you.”

“But what am I supposed to do?” the student asked in alarm.

“Maybe you will have to go back to China until you can get the money you need. Then you could apply again for admission and a visa.”

“But you are supposed to be the adviser. You are supposed to help me.”

“I cannot help you,” the adviser said, “if you gave the school and the visa officer a signed document that was not really true.”

Conversations like this take place in U.S. international student offices at the beginning of every academic term. Wise students will not have conversations like this because they will not go to the United States unless they truly have the money they need.

- ◆ It is wise to have a budget, a plan showing how much money you will spend for each major aspect of your life, and where that money will come from. The box on the next page lists items that are in most students' expense budgets.
- ◆ Obtaining a credit card in the United States can be impossible or at least prohibitively expensive for a foreign student.

Typical Items in a Student's Expense Budget

Tuition and fees
Rent
Food (often called “board,” as in “room and board”)
Health insurance and medical costs
Books and course supplies
Transportation
Communications (mainly telephone and e-mail hookups)
Clothing
Personal expenses
Recreation
Furniture
Travel
Taxes
Expenses for dependents (that is, spouse and/or children who accompany you and are dependent on your financial support), including living costs, health insurance, childcare costs, and tuition for dependents who are in school.

1.5 Contact Your School's Chinese Student Association

On most medium- or large-sized U.S. campuses there is an organization of students (and, if relevant, scholars) from China. It may be called the Chinese Student Association, the name used here. It may have some other name instead, often including the word “friendship.”

Chinese Student Associations (CSAs) provide many services for their members, usually including transportation for new students arriving at the airport, train station, or bus station. CSAs typically have web sites that include information for newcomers. CSAs sponsor social activities and serve as a link between students and scholars on the campus and Chinese embassy or consular officials.

You will want to *contact the CSA* before leaving China to find out what information they offer about your campus and what services they can offer you. The box on the following page suggests ways to contact your CSA.

Keep in mind that CSAs are not official college or university organizations. Some are better organized and more helpful than others. Some provide more complete and accurate information and a wider range of services than others. Use your own judgment to decide how much involvement you want with the CSA at your school.

Contacting the Chinese Student Association

Your school may already have sent you the URL for the CSA on your campus. If you do not already have that information, here are some ways to look for it:

- ◆ Look on your school's International Student Office web site for links to student organizations.
- ◆ Look on your school's Student Activities Office web site for links to student organizations.
- ◆ Go to the China News Digest web site at www.cnd.org and click on the directory of CSSAs (Chinese Student and Scholar Associations). From there, click on "U.S.A." and the name of the state where your school is located. If there is a CSA at your school, it might be linked to the CND site.

If there is no CSA at your school, you can contact one at a nearby, larger school, and ask them for help. You can identify CSAs at other schools in "your" state using the CND site.

1.6. Obtain Medical, Dental, and Vision Examinations

Medical, dental, and vision care are very expensive in the United States. The student health insurance at your school may or may not cover dental and vision care. You can save money and get service in a more familiar setting if you receive medical, dental, and vision examinations and treatments before you leave China.

If your school requires any vaccinations, find out whether you can get them before you leave China. For instance, some schools require students living on campus to obtain a meningitis vaccination before they are allowed to begin their studies. Such a vaccination can easily cost about \$100 in the United States.

If you are currently taking any traditional medicine, you will want to carry a supply with you. Such medicines may be available in large U.S. cities, but not elsewhere.

If you have dependents accompanying you or joining you later, they too will want to get these examinations and treatments before leaving China.

1.7. Pack Properly

What clothing and household items you should pack for your trip will depend on your United States destination—what the climate is like and what shopping possibilities exist in the place you will study. Refer to information from your *International Student Office* (see box in Sec. 1.1) and *Chinese Student Association* (see box in Sec. 1.5).

Wherever you are going to attend school, you should *take certain documents with you* in your carry-on luggage, in case your checked luggage is lost. See the box below for a list of such documents.

Documents to Take in Your Carry-On Bag

- Airline ticket
- Passport
- I-20 or DS-2019
- Evidence of financial support in the amount shown on your I-20 or DS-2019 form
- Documentation of your permanent residence in China
- Extra passport-size photographs
- Official transcripts (or certified copies of them) for all secondary and post-secondary studies (for your spouse as well, if your spouse may want to become a student)
- Medical and dental records, including records of immunizations and vaccinations, for yourself and any dependents; bring an English translation too
- Information about medical conditions, treatments, and medications (including both generic and brand names), for yourself and any dependents
- Supply of any medications you are currently taking
- Eyeglass or contact-lens prescription
- Traveler's cheques, cash, or bank card (debit or ATM) in an amount adequate for travel emergencies and settling-in expenses
- Birth and marriage documents for spouse and children
- International driver's license (if you are in a position to obtain one); Chinese driver's license (if you have one)
- Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for your Chinese Student Association, International Student Office, and/or friend or relative in the United States
- A change of clothing (at least underwear), a toothbrush, and other personal items you would need if your checked luggage is delayed or lost or your flight is delayed

Additional items to consider packing: recipes; tapes or CDs of favorite music; photographs of family and friends; items that reflect life and traditions in your part of China, such as photographs, music, musical instruments, artwork, or folk costumes.

A note about "lost" luggage: It is not rare for checked luggage to be "lost." Usually, it is found and returned to the owner within a day or two. If your luggage is lost you will be asked to fill out a form that includes a description of the bag—size, color, material,

design and also the address to which you are going. Once the bag is found, it will be delivered to that address, usually free of charge.

The airlines have limits on how much they will pay a traveler for a bag that is lost permanently. Airlines provide information about these limits.

Remember that U.S. Department of Homeland Security personnel at the port of entry are authorized to search you and all your luggage when you seek admission to the United States.

Remember also that *your luggage will be subject to security clearances* during your trip. Be sure to follow current guidelines (which your airline should provide) for packing your luggage so you do not create problems for yourself and perhaps suffer travel delays.

Label your luggage, inside and outside with your name and your address at the school you will be attending. If you do not have an address yet, you can put your name c/o the address of your International Student Office.

Learn about your airline's policies concerning luggage: size, weight, and any other matters.

1.8. Arrange for Housing

Pay close attention to the housing information your school sends you. The student-housing situation varies greatly from one U.S. educational institution to another. For example, some small colleges require students to live in college residence halls, leaving few housing choices to the students.

On the other hand, some large universities have little student housing and are located in urban areas with limited housing. New students bound for such schools are encouraged to arrive at least a week or two early to allow time for finding a place to live.

Some schools have deadlines for applying for on-campus housing.

So, first, you need to understand what housing situation you will face.

Most new students will have several other matters to consider:

- 1.8.1. Arranging Temporary Housing
- 1.8.2. Selecting Permanent Housing
- 1.8.3. Leases
- 1.8.4. Renter's Insurance

Each of these is discussed briefly below.

1.8.1. Arranging Temporary Housing

Unless you arrange in advance to move directly into your “permanent” housing, you will need a place to stay immediately after you arrive in the United States.

You should follow the instructions your school sends you about temporary housing, or, as a possible alternative, contact the *Chinese Student Association* (see Sec. 1.5). Be sure you have enough dollars with you or immediately available to you to meet the cost of temporary housing.

Temporary housing may be in a hotel (usually the most expensive option), a youth hostel, college or university facilities, or with a local family or student.

1.8.2. Selecting Permanent Housing

Student housing is either on-campus or off-campus.

On-campus housing is either a residence hall (or “dormitory” or “dorm”), occupied by single students, or an apartment, occupied by a couple or family or by a group of single students.

Some schools require at least some undergraduate students to live in residence halls. Your school’s information will tell you about any such requirement.

Off-campus housing is usually either a “room” or an apartment. Apartments, in turn, can be “efficiency,” one-bedroom, or two- (or more) bedroom. Apartments can be “furnished” (that is, with furniture) or “unfurnished” (without furniture).

A “room” has facilities for sleeping and studying, and possibly shared cooking facilities. It may be in a private house or in a “rooming house,” which has many sleeping and studying rooms and shared cooking and bathroom facilities.

An apartment is a complete living unit, with nothing other than laundry facilities shared with other residents. An efficiency apartment has two rooms, a bathroom and a large room that serves as kitchen, eating area, living room, and bedroom. Most efficiencies accommodate a maximum of two adults.

In deciding on a rental unit, ask other students about the desirability of the location and check with the local housing authority for a list of inspected units. Some cities provide an inspection service and maintain a list of the units that have passed inspection. You can use such a list to check on the livability of the unit you are considering.

In addition to the type of housing and its location and cost, you will need to consider *three other matters* related to housing:

- 1.8.2.1. Potential Roommates
- 1.8.2.2. Smoking
- 1.8.2.3. Cooking.

1.8.2.1. Potential Roommates

Chinese students, like students from any other country, have the opportunity to live with Americans or with students from other countries. Doing so has some important advantages: improved English proficiency, enlarged knowledge of other cultures and traditions, and the ability to work with a wider variety of people. These are the traditional benefits of going to another country to study.

In practice, most Chinese students live in rooming houses or apartments with other Chinese students. The housing has been arranged for them before they arrive in the United States. *If you want to gain as much as possible from your study-abroad experience, you will resist the temptation to make your life “easier” by living with other students from China.*

1.8.2.2. Smoking

Many landlords, including colleges and universities, prohibit smoking in the rooms or apartments they rent. If you smoke, you will need to be willing to go outdoors with your cigarettes. Otherwise, you limit the housing options that are available to you.

1.8.2.3. Cooking

Traditional Chinese cooking causes grease to accumulate in the cooking area. Many landlords and fellow tenants object to this, and will want you to make special efforts to maintain a clean—and clean-smelling—kitchen.

Also, some people dislike the smells of some Chinese food and spices.

1.8.3. Leases

A “lease” is a *binding legal agreement* between a renter (or “tenant”) and landlord. *When you sign a lease you are responsible for paying the specified rent to the landlord for the period of time the lease specifies.* Most leases for student housing extend for nine or 12 months.

Leases are generally difficult to break.

The implication is that *you should sign a lease only after you are certain you understand and accept all its provisions*. Do not assume you can easily change the lease, ignore the obligations it places on you, or be released from it.

The lease will usually require you to pay first month's rent, last month's rent, and a "damage deposit" or "security deposit" in the amount of a month's rent. Therefore, be prepared to pay three months' rent in order to move in to a rental unit. If at the end of the lease you have fulfilled your obligations and have not damaged the housing unit, your deposit will be returned.

1.8.4. Renter's Insurance

Prudent students buy renter's insurance to protect their personal property from theft or damage from fire or flooding. Renter's insurance is comparatively inexpensive and can be very helpful in case of an unexpected disaster.

Look in the classified section ("yellow pages") of the telephone directory under "insurance" to locate brokers who sell renter's insurance.

1.9. Purchase Health and Accident Insurance

Health care in the United States is extraordinarily, sometimes unbelievably, expensive. *Only foolish or impoverished people fail to buy health insurance to help protect themselves and their dependents from large medical bills*. And even if you buy insurance, you should be sure you have enough savings to pay for some medical bills. Many insurance companies require you to pay the bill first, then request a reimbursement from them. Reimbursement checks sometimes take several weeks to arrive, and sometimes do not cover the total amount you spent.

You should *buy traveler's insurance* to cover you during your trip and the early part of your stay in the United States, unless you already have insurance that will cover you outside China.

Many U.S. higher-education institutions *require* foreign students (and sometimes all students) to buy health insurance. Federal immigration regulations *require* students and dependents in J status to have health insurance that meets specified standards. Your school should inform you about those standards if you will be in J status (that is, you use Form DS-2019 to obtain your visa).

Your International Student Office will provide information to you about health-insurance policies that are available to you at the school you will attend.

See Sec. 7.6 for more information about health insurance.

1.10. A Pre-Departure Checklist for People Admitted to a U.S. School

Below is a comprehensive checklist you can use in planning for your departure.

Pre-Departure Checklist

- Obtain a passport for yourself and any dependents who will accompany you.
- Obtain a student or exchange-visitor visa from a U.S. consular post. The box on the next page has more information about these visas.
- Make arrangements for health and accident insurance that will cover you (and your dependents) during your travels and the early part of your stay. See Sec. 7.6 for more information about insurance.
- Learn how to get to the school you will attend, and make your travel arrangements. See Sec. 1.3.
- Reconfirm your flight reservations 72 hours before your scheduled departure.
- Give your family a contact number in the United States, such as the number of the International Student Office or an officer of the Chinese Student Association.
- If doing so is possible and reflects your preferences, apply for school-sponsored housing (residence hall or apartment). See Sec. 1.8.
- Pack your carry-on bag. See Sec. 1.7.

Obtaining a Student or Exchange-Visitor Visa

What kind of visa you apply for depends on the kind of document your school or sponsoring organization provides you:

--If you have a *Form I-20* from a school, you apply for an F-1 “student” visa. (And your dependents apply for F-2 visas.)

--If you have a *Form DS-2019* from your school or sponsoring organization, you apply for a J-1 “exchange-visitor” visa. (And your dependents apply for J-2 visas.)

Where you apply for your visa depends on where you live. For visa-issuing purposes, the United States government has divided China into six “consular jurisdictions,” one for each of the consular offices. The consular offices are in Beijing (attached to the U.S. embassy), Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Shenyang. The embassy’s web site, at www.usembassy-china.org.cn, includes a map showing the jurisdiction of each consular post.

Procedures for applying for a visa can change from time to time and may vary among consular posts. You should *check the website of the consular post where you will apply for your visa* to learn what documents, fees, and procedures are needed for the kind of visa you (and your dependents) need.

Also, *carefully read any instructions or information your school sends you* about your visa-application process.

When you apply for your visa, be sure you use the I-20 or DS-2019 for the school you plan to attend. Major problems arise if you use one school’s I-20 or DS-2019 to obtain your visa and then seek to attend a different school once you are in the United States.

1.11. Reflect

Before you leave for the United States, you may want to think about your goals and expectations for the experience. Doing so can smooth your adjustment process and help you get maximum benefit from your stay.

You can think about these matters in your own mind, write yourself some notes about them, or discuss them with someone.

First, what are your *goals* in going to the United States? The box on the following page gives you some questions to consider.

Goals for Studying in the United States

What do you hope to accomplish while you are in the United States?

Do you have certain goals related to a *career*? What career do you hope to pursue? What will you need to do in the United States to help yourself enter and succeed in that career? What will you have to study? What grades will you need to achieve? What experiences besides class work (for example, internships, attending professional conferences, getting papers published, making the acquaintance of certain people) will help you realize your career objectives?

Thorough preparation for life in an interdependent world requires learning to live and work among people who are different from you. Beyond your career goals, do you want to *learn as much as possible from your intercultural experience*? If you do, you need to think about living, eating, studying, and socializing outside the circle of Chinese students.

Do you intend to *improve your English*? If so, what plans do you have for making sure it happens? Will you take classes? Get a tutor? Find native speakers of English to practice with? Do you realize that learning English is difficult to do, and that you will need to practice virtually every day to make sure your English gets better?

What are your goals concerning *family relationships*? What kind of relationships do you want to maintain with your parents, any siblings, and with your friends? How will you maintain those relationships while you are away? If you are married and want to maintain your marriage, what will you have to do? If you have a child, how will you maintain the parent-child relationship?

Second, what are your *expectations*? Whether you are aware of it or not, you have in mind ideas about what your experience as a student in the United States will be like. Those expectations help determine your reactions to the actual experience. Your expectations may be realized, but they may not be. Your experience can be more positive if you are aware of your expectations and think about how appropriate they are.

To help you consider in more detail your expectations or assumptions about being a student in the United States, you can think about the questions below. *You will not know the answers to all these questions now*. Even so, it helps to think about them. The questions come under these headings:

- Your trip
- Arrival
- “Culture shock” and cultural differences
- Housing
- Food
- Academics
- Daily Life

- Finances
- Social Life
- Health

Here are the questions:

◆ Your Trip

- How long will you have to wait at the airport before you actually depart?
- How long will the trip last? Will you be able to sleep?
- How will you respond to any delays in your travels?
- How will you feel when you first arrive in the United States? Tired? Hungry? Nervous? Excited? Cautious? Eager?
- Will you have to change planes inside the United States? If so, what will that be like?
- How will the customs and immigration officials at the port of entry treat you?
- How much will you have to use English?

◆ Arrival

- What time of day will you arrive at the airport (or bus station or train station) nearest your school?
- What will the weather be like?
- Who, if anyone, will meet you at the airport?
- How will you get to your campus? How long will it take?
- Where will you stay the first night?
- Where will you eat?
- Whom will you talk to? Who will be available to help you?
- How will you find out about places to shop for the things you need?
- Will you be worried about money?
- What will you be thinking about?

◆ Culture Shock and Cultural Differences

- What new things will you notice the most?
- What will you miss about your home?
- How well will people understand your English? How well will you understand theirs?
- How will you be feeling, physically?
- How will you be feeling, emotionally?
- How will people treat you?
- How will you respond to the informality among Americans—their relative lack of attention to differences in social status or age?
- Will your social status as a student be the same as or different from what it is in China?
- How much of the Americans' "individualism" will you have to adopt? What does "individualism" seem to mean to them? "Freedom?"

- ◆ Housing
 - If you do not already have a place to live “permanently,” how will you find one?
 - What will the place where you live be like?
 - How much will it cost?
 - If you live with someone else, who will it be?
 - How will you get back and forth between the place you live and your school?

- ◆ Food
 - Will you eat much American or other non-Chinese food?
 - Will you cook your own food? If not, where will you get your meals?
 - Who will eat with you?
 - Where will you get your groceries? How will you transport them?
 - How much will it cost to eat?

- ◆ Academics
 - What will your classes be like?
 - What do you think will be different from being a student in China?
 - How much responsibility will you have for such things as deciding what courses to take and what topics to research?
 - How much time will you spend each day on your studies?
 - Where will you study?
 - Will your academic work be interesting to you, or boring?
 - Will you feel pressure to get high grades? If so, where will that pressure come from? How will you respond to it?
 - How will teachers treat you? How will other students treat you?
 - What kind of relationship will you have with your academic adviser? How often will you talk with him or her? How helpful will he or she be?

- ◆ Daily Life
 - What will your daily schedule be (that is, more or less when will you get up in the morning, have your meals, go to bed)?
 - How will you get around?
 - Will you want to get news from China? If so, where will you get it?
 - Will your life be generally relaxed, or stressful?
 - What will you do during school holidays?
 - How will you feel when Americans are celebrating their holidays?

- ◆ Finances
 - How much money will be available to you each month?
 - What portion of your money will be needed for rent? Food? Books?
 - Do you plan to save money (in a bank or certificate of deposit, for example)?
 - Are there particular things you intend to buy?
 - Will you be under pressure to “economize” (that is, spend money cautiously) or will you have plenty of money?

◆ Social Life

- What people will you see most often? What kind of relationship will you have with them?
- How will you adjust to being away from your friends and family in China?
- Where and how will you meet new people? Will you have friends? If so, where will they be from?
- Will you have American friends?
- What will you do evenings? Weekends?
- Will you travel inside the United States? If so, will you do it alone or with other people?

◆ Health

- Will you get sick? If you get sick, what will you do?
- What will you do to maintain your health? Will you exercise? If so, what form of exercise will you use, and where?
- Will you practice tai chi or some other traditional Chinese form of exercise and meditation?

1.12. On arrival

For most new students, the days immediately following arrival in the United States are extremely stressful. The students are tired. They have pressing concerns about where they will sleep and eat. They are overwhelmed with the large number of new things, from the climate and the smell of things to the workings of the transportation system. Their ability to communicate in English is limited, probably more so than they expected.

And, they have many things to do:

- 1.12.1. Visit the International Student Office
- 1.12.2. Find Housing
- 1.12.3. Open a Bank Account
- 1.12.4. Apply for a Social Security Number (if necessary)
- 1.12.5. Attend Orientation Program(s)
- 1.12.6. Visit Your Academic Department

Below is some detail about each of these matters.

1.12.1. Visit the International Student Office

Your International Student Office (ISO—see box in Sec. 1.1) will send you information about when and where you should report for ISO new-student procedures.

Generally, an ISO needs to see every new student's travel documents in order to fulfill governmental reporting requirements. Also, to maintain your immigration status, you

need to be sure your ISO knows you have arrived and has certain information about you and any dependents who are with you.

In addition, your ISO will probably have an *orientation program* (see Sec. 1.12.5) designed to help new students learn about the campus and about academic procedures new students need to follow.

If you will have a graduate assistantship or other form of employment, your ISO will help or give instructions for obtaining the Social Security number you will need.

Be sure you arrange to receive any e-mail messages, newsletters, or bulletins the ISO distributes to foreign students. These messages will keep you informed about governmental and institutional procedures that affect you.

1.12.2. Find Housing

Sec. 1.8 gives basic information about housing for college and university students in the United States.

If housing has not already been arranged for you, you will want to learn as soon as possible about ways to locate available housing in your community. You may use newspaper advertisements, signs on buildings, notices on bulletin boards, a student housing office on the campus, or some combination of those. Your International Student Office may be able to help with your housing search (but at larger schools that is not likely). At least, it will give suggestions about how to find a place to live.

If there is a Chinese Student Association (or, at small colleges, an international student organization), its members will probably help you.

If you are looking for a place to live, having the help of someone familiar with the local area is beneficial. So is having a map of the local area, as well as a map showing public transportation routes (if there is a public transportation system). Your ISO will probably provide such maps.

If you live off campus, you will need to find out about “initiating” gas, water, and electrical services (these are called “utilities”). Your ISO or landlord will probably provide this information. You will also need to decide what telephone services you want, and that can be complicated.

1.12.3. Open a Bank Account

Virtually all students open a “checking account” at a local bank. Virtually all Chinese students open a “savings account” as well. And, nearly everyone has an “ATM card” so they can do banking procedures using automated teller machines.

Generally, any U.S. bank is as safe as any other. A local bank is as safe and secure as a well known international bank. The main consideration for Chinese students in selecting a bank is whether it provides international banking services, converting currency to and from U.S. dollars and making it easy to transfer money to and from the United States.

In practice, most Chinese students choose a bank based on recommendations from Chinese students who have been living in the community.

1.12.4. Apply for a Social Security Number (if necessary)

Any legitimate form of employment in the United States, including graduate teaching and research assistantships, requires having a “Social Security number.” The number is needed for income-tax and payroll-reporting purposes.

Social Security numbers are issued by the Social Security Administration, a U.S. government agency.

Your International Student Office will give you information about procedures for applying for a Social Security number. Those procedures have been changing—becoming more stringent—since the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington. Obtaining a Social Security number may require a long processing period.

1.12.5. Attend Orientation Program(s)

Wise new students attend all possible orientation programs, so they can (a) acquire useful and sometimes vital information, (2) learn their way around the campus and the community, (c) meet new people, some of whom may prove important in their lives as students, (d) practice their English, and (e) get their questions answered.

Orientation Program Really Did Help!

“I was told by my friends that it is not very important to attend the orientation program,” said a recently-arrived student from China, “but they all proved to be wrong. I sincerely feel that any new student must attend. I had a lot of anxiety, excitement, and restlessness when I came here, but the orientation program gave me all the details I needed to know. Now I give tips to my country friends about what I learned at the orientation program.”

You may have as many as four orientation programs, those organized by:

- The International Student Office (ISO)
- Your academic department
- Some student affairs office (such as the dean of students or the admissions or orientation office) for *undergraduate* students or a graduate-studies office (for *graduate* students)
- The Chinese Student Association (CSA)

A few words about each of these:

The *ISO's orientation program* is necessarily general, since it will be designed for students in many fields of study and for undergraduate as well as graduate students (except at undergraduate colleges, which have no graduate students). A key part of the ISO's program concerns *the federal immigration procedures and requirements you must follow in order to remain legally in the United States*. Your ISO cannot take responsibility for your retaining your legal status. *You must know and abide by the government's regulations yourself*. (Chapter 6 has some information about these regulations.) Attending the ISO's orientation program will give you information you need in order to do so. And, it will give you other helpful information as well.

Some *academic departments* have brief orientation programs for their new graduate students. These programs can be much more focused than the ISO's program, since they concern the procedures, requirements, facilities, and personnel of one particular department.

Incoming undergraduates usually participate in an orientation program provided by a *student-services office*, and new graduate students usually receive a general orientation program through the *graduate-studies* unit, whatever it is called. These programs introduce new students to campus services and resources and are an excellent way for international students to gain useful information and meet U.S. students.

Many *CSAs* have orientation programs, formal or informal, for new students. These too can provide much useful information, particularly about daily life at the school. Sometimes, though, they give a narrower view of students' situations and options than do programs organized by people with a broader perspective. *CSA* orientation programs cannot take the place of *ISO* programs, which are the source of "official" information new students need.

1.12.6. Visit your Academic Department

If you will be a graduate student, you will want to visit your academic department, whether or not it has an orientation program. Introduce yourself to the departmental secretary or administrative staff; find out where you will get your mail, which e-mail lists to join, and where notices for students are posted. Find out who your academic adviser will be and make arrangements to meet that person. Ask someone to show you whatever departmental facilities are available to graduate students—libraries, reading rooms, computer centers, research laboratories, photocopying equipment, research equipment, lounges, vending machines, microwave ovens, refrigerators, etc.

If you are a graduate student you may come to feel as though you are living at your academic department, so the sooner you learn your way around it, the better.